DAISY

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BY

M. MARSHALL SAUNDERS

Author of "Beautiful Joe"

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"A little child shall lead them"

PHILADELPHIA
CHARLES H. BANES
1420 Chestnut Street

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This little story, by Miss Marshall Saunders, author of "Beautiful Joe," appeared some years ago in England, in the interests of a benevolent institution. It has seemed worthy of a wider publication, and hence it is brought out in its present dress. The infantile grace and quaint ways of the little child; her influence in shaping a somewhat warped life, with all its incidental lessons, and the final happy ending of it all, will give the little story, we are sure, a wide audience and a cordial reception.

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CHAPTER I

A Baby's Grace

ONE evening, Mrs. Drummond, the tired, careworn woman who presided over our boarding house, glanced down the well-spread table, and informed us that the next day we were to have a new boarder—a Mr. Robertson, a young bank clerk who had lately come from England to our prosperous Canadian town.

I knew the lad by reputation, and the next morning when he sauntered into the dining room, I looked at him carefully. Poor boy, his eye was heavy, and his step languid. In his foolish

endeavors to "see life," he was fast losing the purity of heart and mind with which he had quitted his far-away home, and it was making its mark upon him in a way not to be mistaken.

He sat opposite me, and I could see that he was making a mere pretence of taking his breakfast.

Presently, there was a remark from Mrs. Drummond's end of the table. The child was speaking—the child par excellence, for there was not another one in the house. She was a curious little creature—willful, disdainful, neglected by her mother, and suspicious of all other mortals. Petting she despised, and invariably showed symptoms of displeasure if disturbed in her favorite occupation of playing with an ugly, yellow cat in dark corners of the house. But the strangest

thing of all was her quietness. She never romped like other children, never prattled; indeed, she rarely spoke at all, so we were all attention as she pointed to young Robertson with her spoon, and said in a clear, babyish voice, "Dat's a berry fine-lookin' boy, mamma."

Everybody smiled, for the boy in question, though manly and stalwart in appearance, had a decidedly plain face. He blushed a little, and bent over his plate. Mrs. Drummond took her hand from the coffee-urn long enough to lay it on Daisy's head: "Hush, child, you must not talk at the table."

"Wemove dat hand," said the child, in a displeased tone. Then rapping on the table with her spoon, to call Robertson's attention, she asked, "Boy, what's your name?"

"Roland Robertson," he replied, with an embarrassed laugh.

Daisy, intensely interested, and altogether regardless of the boarders' amused glances, said in a stage whisper, while she solemnly wagged her curly head, "Woland Wobertson, I love you." Then scrambling out of her high-chair, she ran down the long room, and peremptorily demanded a seat on his knee.

He started, looked annoyed, then sheepish, and finally took her up. It did not suit his English reserve to be made the cynosure of all eyes. Daisy sedately arranged her flounces, then watched him playing with his food. "Don't you like fwicasseed chicken?" she asked, gently.

"Yes," he said; "but I am not hungry."

"Some mornin's I eat nuffin too," she said,

in a relieved way, "more partickler when I have a glass of milk in de night. Woland," tenderly patting the hand around her waist, "did you have a dwink in de night?"

Robertson's face became scarlet. She viewed him with the utmost solicitude. Then turning to a lady next her, who had finished her breakfast, and was indolently fanning herself, "Dive me dat fan, de poor darlin' is hot."

Both on that occasion and many subsequent ones, Daisy amused us by the epithets she bestowed upon her favorite. We found that she had not been an inattentive observer of the many newly married couples that had sojourned at Mrs. Drummond's.

Robertson was fanned for several minutes—Daisy striking his face,

with an extra now and then for his nose, in her awkward zeal, until I wondered at his patience. Suddenly, he pushed back his chair, said he had finished his breakfast and that she had better get down. This gave rise to a stroke of childish policy. She ordered the table-maid to bring her hitherto neglected plate of porridge, and putting the spoon in Robertson's hand insisted upon his feeding her. He complied with a pretty good grace. Daisy kept up an unbroken scrutiny of his face, and presently dodging a spoonful of milk, laid a pink forefinger on his upper lip. There was just the faintest suspicion of a moustache there. "I fordet what you call dis," she said, "moss—moss——"

"Moustache," he replied, abruptly bringing the porridge feeding performance to a close, and

putting her on her tiny feet. She ran out of the room after him, pulling the napkin from her neck as she went. When I reached the hall, Robertson was taking down his hat from the rack, Daisy in close attendance. She was just prefacing a remark with, "Woland, love," when Mrs. Drummond came out of the dining room. "Daisy," she said, peevishly, "you must say Mr. Robertson."

"How berry cross you are dis mornin'," said the child, throwing a glance at her over her shoulder; then turning to Robertson, she went on to ask him whether he would soon come back to see her.

"No," he replied, his hand on the door, "I lunch in town; you won't see me till evening." The child's face fell, and she turned silently away.

I went out quickly, and overtook him before he

reached the corner of the street. "That child seems to have taken quite a fancy to you," I said quietly; "I never before knew her to show so much interest in any one."

"I don't know why she does," he answered awkwardly, and with some impatience, "unless it is owing to my having spoken to her the other day. When I went to engage my room, she was sitting in a corner alone, and I gave her a picture I happened to have in my pocket." He stopped suddenly. He did not tell me then, nor did I find out until long afterward, that the little, lonely child had reminded him of a dead sister of his, and that when he gave her the picture, he gave her a kiss with it.

I made some trite remark about the softening and good influences a child can throw around

one—I did not intend to hint at all that he was in need of such influences; but so suspicious was he in his dawning manhood, that he resented my remark, and relapsed into profound silence. A minute later, he left me, under the pretence of taking a short cut to the bank.

I did not see him again until evening. I entered the dining room on the first stroke of the dinner bell. Mrs. Drummond had just preceded me. I could not help smiling at her dismayed face. Daisy, with excited, nervous movements, was dragging her high-chair from the head of the table, to a place near Robertson's.

"That young man has bewitched the child," she said fretfully. "She slapped me just now, because I would not let her put on her best dress for him."

While she was speaking Robertson entered the room. He was in better spirits than in the morning. When his eye fell on Daisy, sitting flushed with victory beside his plate, he smiled and pinched her cheek as he sat down. During the progress of the meal he showed a certain amount of attention to the scrap of humanity at his side; and she, with no eyes for the other people at the table, hung on his looks, and with a more practical interest in his welfare, watched every morsel of food that went into his mouth. Once she said impatiently to me, "You wed-haired man, you—don't you see dat Woland wants some vegetables? Pass some quick."

Dinner over, all scattered about the house. Daisy never retired earlier than any other person, so I watched her curiously to see what she

would do. Robertson had gone to his room. With a disappointed air she seated herself on the lowest step of the staircase. Some young men standing about the hall tried to tease her. "Baby dear," said one of them mischievously, "I'm afraid you're going to be a flirt."

"What's dat?" she said, holding out inviting arms to the yellow cat that was sneaking about my boots.

"A flirt is an animal with eyes all over its head, and an enormous mouth, and it goes about the world eating men," explained another.

Poor Daisy—she was yet at the stage of believing everything she heard. She shrugged her white shoulders, as she said, "Drefful!" and hugged her dingy cat a little closer. Presently they all laughed. She had thrown the cat to

the floor, and sprung to her feet. Robertson was coming downstairs, very carefully dressed, a light overcoat thrown over his arm. Evidently, it was his intention to spend the evening with some of his friends.

Daisy inquired wistfully whether he was going out, and on his replying in the affirmative, she asked whether it was "work" that was taking him—that term signifying to her something that could not be neglected.

"No, Daisy," he said, trying to escape her detaining hands, "I am going to see a play."

"Woland," she said beseechingly, "won't you stay an' play wid me an' Pompey?" pointing toward the yellow cat, that was glaring at him from under a hall chair.

It was not a very inviting prospect. He

laughed, put her aside, saying, "Some other time, little girl," and went toward the hall door. The child watched him, her little breast heaving, her hands clenched tightly in the folds of her dress. He was going to leave her, the only person in the house whom she cared for. The disappointment was too great, "Oh, Woland—I fought you would stay," she said, in a choking voice. Then dropping on the white fur rug at her feet, she burst into a perfect passion of tears.

This was such an unprecedented proceeding on the part of the self-contained child, that a crowd of anxious faces soon surrounded her. "Whatever is the matter with the child?" said her mother querulously, as she bent over the pink, sobbing bundle. "She hasn't cried since the day she fell downstairs, and nearly killed herself."

Robertson hurried back at the sound of the wailing voice. "Has she hurt herself?" he asked anxiously. He looked astonished when we explained the cause of her emotion. "Don't cry, Daisy," he said, "I will stay with you to-morrow evening."

The child's sobs redoubled. He hesitated, looked at his watch, then muttered "I suppose I would be a brute to leave her like this."

"Daisy," I whispered in her curly locks, "he is going to stay with you." A shriek of joy, and the child was on her feet, clinging to his hand with an enthusiasm that made him turn away with a half-foolish air. The next two hours were uninterrupted bliss for Daisy. She spent them in one of the parlors, leaning against Robertson's knee, looking at photographs of the

Athenian Marbles. They were evidently Greek to her, but one glance at Robertson would smooth out her little, puzzled forehead. At ten o'clock her little head drooped and she soon fell fast asleep, so that he carried her upstairs, her face bordered by its curls resting confidingly on his shoulder. When he came down, I saw him glance irresolutely at the clock, as if uncertain whether to go out or not. I asked him whether he would like to come to my room. I had some curios which I had picked up in my rambles about the world which I thought would be of interest to him. Some of them I told him were from Athens, and bore some relation to the Marbles he had been examining. He thanked me very politely, but very stiffly, and said that at some future time he would like to see them. In

some way, he hardly knew why, he felt very sleepy this evening, and would go to bed at once. He went, and thoughts of his little companion went with him as he sunk to a rest purer and sweeter than that which had been his during the weeks preceding.

CHAPTER II

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

THE next day was Sunday. As I came downstairs in the morning I saw that Daisy was in her old place, on the lowest step of the staircase. My salutation she returned with reserve, but presently I heard a gay, "Mornin', dear," and turning around, saw that she was holding up her face to Robertson for a kiss. Before they entered the dining room, she made solicitous inquiries about his night's rest. He laughed shortly. "I haven't slept so well for many a night," he said. Her little face brightened, and they went together to the table.

The church bells were ringing when we finished breakfast, and some one laughingly asked Daisy where she was going to attend service. "You are teasin' me," she said rebukingly; "you know I berry seldom go out."

"Does no one take you for walks?" asked Robertson. The child shook her head, and said that her mamma was always busy. The lad drew up his stalwart frame, stifled some kind of an indignant exclamation, and looked pityingly down at the pale, delicate figure of the child. Daisy was watching him attentively. "Woland," she said inquiringly, "Have you any work dis mornin'?"

"No, Daisy."

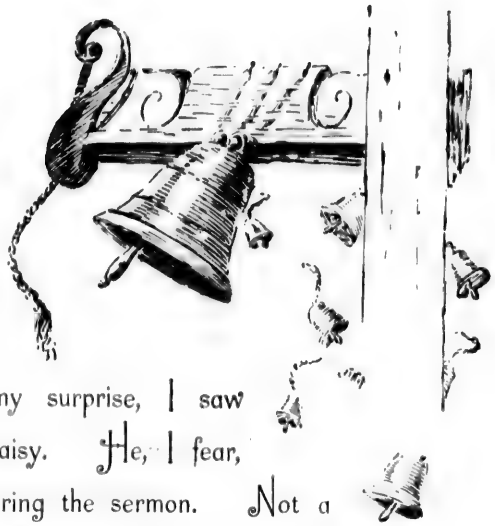
"Then can't you dive me a walk?"

Her little hand stole confidingly in his. Her

tone was coaxing in the extreme. He laughed, and said: "Very well—go ask your mamma."

In delighted surprise, she scampered to her mother's end of the table. "Mamma, may I go a-walkin' wid Wo—wid Mithter Wobertson?" Mrs. Drummond looked up, hastily ran her eyes over Daisy's shabby frock, then over Robertson's handsome suit of clothes. "You have nothing fit to wear, child."

Daisy's face became the picture of despair. "The child looks very well as she is," interposed Robertson dryly, as he walked toward them, "and it is a warm day; she only wants a bonnet." Daisy listened in delight, then when her mother's consent was gained, seized Robertson's fingers and pressed them to her lips. Not long after I had taken my seat in church that morning, a tall



young man with a child clinging to him, came walking up the aisle to a seat in front of me. To my surprise, I saw Robertson and Daisy. He, I fear, napped a little during the sermon. Not a word was lost on Daisy. She sat bolt upright, her hands clasped in front of her, her eyes fixed on the clergyman. At the close of the service, we found ourselves near each other and walked home together. As we passed through the hot, sunny streets, Robertson, as if to apologize for being in church, said, "After we got outdoors this morning, Daisy insisted upon going to church, to see the clergyman 'wing de bells.'"

"The child is almost a heathen," I answered, in a low voice; "I wish her mother would send her to Sunday-school."

Daisy's sharp ears caught my remark. "Is dat where little chillens go Sunday afternoons, wid pretty books under dere arms?"

"Yes," I replied; "wouldn't you like to go too?"

"May I, Woland?" eagerly. "I will be berry good."

He laughed, and said that they must ask her mamma to give the subject her consideration.

For the rest of the day, Daisy followed Robertson about the house like a pet dog. Toward evening, some of his friends came in, and he shook himself free from her, and went up to his room with them. After a time, they all

came trooping downstairs. The sound of their merry voices floated to the room where I was sitting. But they were all hushed, when a babyish voice asked, "Are you going out, Woland?"

Robertson resorted to artifice to prevent the recurrence of a scene. "Daisy," he said, "my friend here, Mr. Danforth"—laying his hand on the shoulder of the youth nearest him—"is a great admirer of yellow cats. Do you suppose that Pompey could be persuaded to walk upstairs and say 'How-do-you-do' to him?"

"Oh yes, dear boy," said the child, trotting downstairs to fulfill her favorite's behest. When the sound of her footsteps died away, there was subdued laughter, and some one said, "Who is that pretty child, Robertson?" Then the door banged, and there was silence.

When I heard Daisy returning, I went to the door. She came hurrying along, firmly holding the disconsolate-looking, yellow animal under her arm. A blank look overspread her face when she saw that I was sole occupant of the hall. "Where is Mithter Wobertson?" she inquired of me in a dignified way.

"He has gone out," I said, as gently as I could. "Won't you come and talk to me for a little while?" Disregarding the latter part of my sentence, she said mournfully, "Do you weally fink so?"

I nodded my head. She let the cat slip to the floor, with a wrathful "Get downstairs, you wetched beast," and then went silently away. There was a little, dark corner near a back staircase, to which she often retreated in times of

great trouble. There I think she passed the next hour. About nine o'clock she appeared and from that time until nearly every one in the house had gone to bed, she wandered restlessly, but quietly, about the parlors and halls. I knew what she was waiting for—poor, little, lonely creature. Shortly after eleven, Mrs. Drummond put her head in the room. "Why, Daisy," fretfully, "aren't you in bed yet? Go right upstairs."

The child silently obeyed, refusing, by a disdainful gesture, my offer to carry her. That night I could not get to sleep. It seemed as if I too was listening for a returning footstep. About one o'clock, there was a sound on the staircase. I got up, opened my door, and seeing that the night-light was burning in the hall, stepped out.

Robertson, with his hand on the railing, and a terribly red face, was coming slowly upstairs. Just as he reached his door, a little, white-robed figure stole into the hall. She ran up to him. "Oh my darlin', darlin' boy," with a curious catching of her breath, "I fought you was lost, like de Babes in de Wood."

He steadied himself against the wall, only half comprehending what she said. Then he muttered thickly, "Go to bed, child."

"Vewy well," she murmured obediently, then standing on tip-toe, "Kiss me good-night, Woland."

With abashed eyes and shamed countenance, the young man looked down at the innocent, baby face, shining out of its tangle of curls. He was not fit to kiss her and he knew it. He turned

his head from her, and in tones harsher than he really meant said, "Go away, Daisy."

The child still clung to him. She did not understand why the caress should be denied her. Suddenly his mood changed. He uttered an oath, pushed her violently from him, and staggered into his room.

The child fell, struck her head heavily against the floor, then lay quite white and still. I hastened toward her, took her up in my arms, and rapped at her mother's door. Mrs. Drummond was still up, sitting before a table, making entries in an account book. She started in nervous surprise, then when I explained matters, looked toward the empty crib, and said, "She must have slipped by me when my back was turned. Has she fainted? She sometimes does. I don't

know why she should be such a delicate child. Please put her in the crib. I will get some brandy."

I glanced uneasily at the child's pale face, then quitted the room. Early the next morning, Mrs. Drummond knocked at my door. "I wish you would come and look at Daisy," she said querulously; "she has not slept all night, and now she has fallen into a kind of stupor; I can't get her to speak to me."

I hurried to the child's cot, and bending over it said, "Daisy, don't you want some breakfast?"

She neither moved nor spoke, and after making other ineffectual attempts to rouse her, I said, "The child is ill—you must call a doctor."

"Suppose we get Mr. Robertson to speak to her," she replied. "This may be only temper."

On going to his room I shook him vigorously. "Robertson, Robertson, wake up." After some difficulty, I roused him. He shuffled off the bed as I told him my errand, and in a moment we were beside the sick child.

"Speak to her," said Mrs. Drummond impatiently; "she is ill."

He brushed his hand over his face, and leaning over her said, "Daisy, won't you speak to me?"

At the sound of his voice, the child opened her eyes, and looked up at him dreamily. Then in a low voice, she repeated the terrible oath he had uttered a few hours before. It sounded unspeakably dreadful coming from her childish lips.

"Put on your coat," I said, "and go for a doctor; the child's mind is wandering."

CHAPTER III

ALMOST LOST

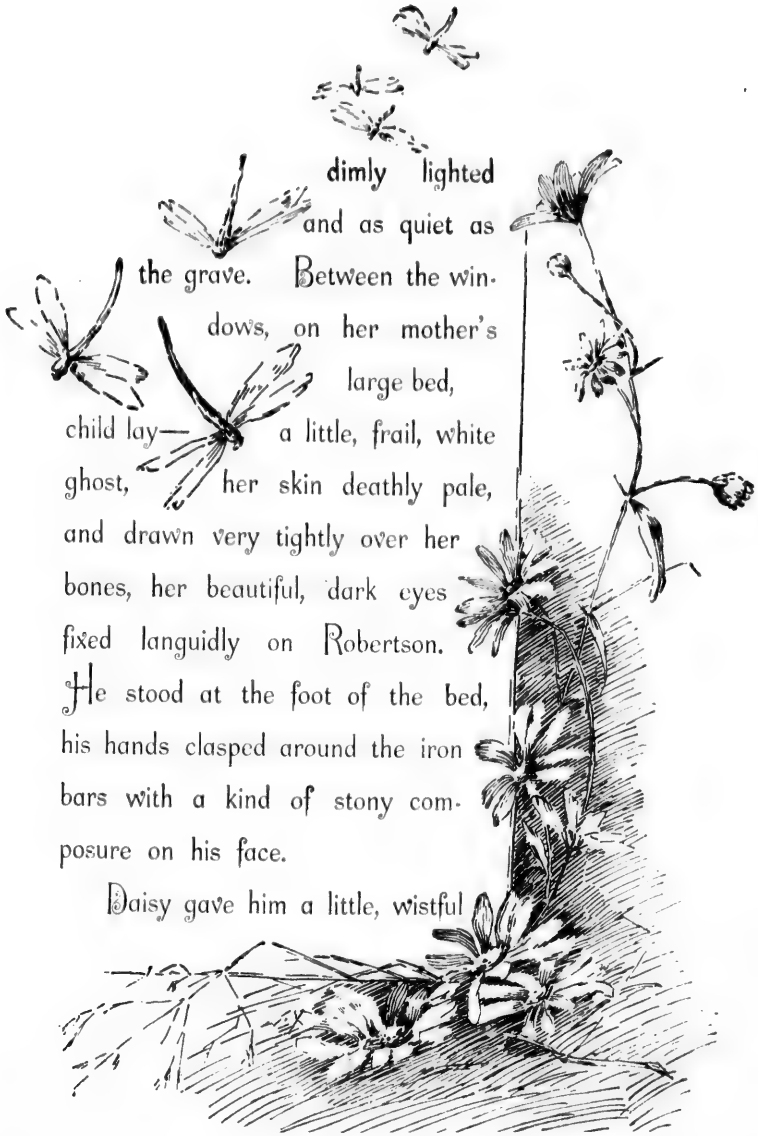
THAT was the beginning of troublous times. For that day, and many subsequent days, the angel of death hovered over the child. A fever had seized upon her, and her little body became wasted and spent till she was but a shadow of her former self. In her delirium, Robertson's name was constantly on her lips. He, poor fellow, could do nothing. From the first day a nurse was installed in the sick-room, and no one was allowed to enter.

It was on that day that I met, on my way to my office, one of Robertson's superiors in the bank. "By the way," he said, "one of our clerks boards where you do—Roland Robertson, his name is. Do you know anything about

him? Can you tell me anything in regard to his habits?"

"Very little," I said hesitatingly. I knew that the man before me was a model of all virtues, and had very little patience with youthful follies. He spoke a few words in a disparaging way, and I knew that Robertson's careless habits were drawing suspicion upon him, and endangering the remarkably good position he held. The thought flashed into my mind, that perhaps it would be as well for little Daisy to die. The shock of having been the indirect means of her death would sober the lad her little lonely heart had clung to, and make a man of him for life. God was going to take her from us. I pitied Robertson from the bottom of my heart. He was going about the house with a set face which as-

sured me that he had not the slightest hope of the child's recovery. He never spoke to any one, and after the bank closed, came home and shut himelf up in his room. How he passed the time no one knew. One night, I heard Mrs. Drummond come to his door, knock gently, and ask whether he would like to come and say good-bye to Daisy. The doctor had said that she would probably not live through the night, and the nurse thought that now she was having the lucid interval which sometimes comes before death—and she wanted to see him. I stole quietly out of my room, Robertson stood in the hall, his hand on the door-handle, an expression of terrible anguish on his face. Suddenly he composed his features, and went toward the child's room. I paused on the threshold. The room was



dimly lighted and as quiet as the grave. Between the windows, on her mother's large bed, child lay— a little, frail, white ghost, her skin deathly pale, and drawn very tightly over her bones, her beautiful, dark eyes fixed languidly on Robertson. He stood at the foot of the bed, his hands clasped around the iron bars with a kind of stony composure on his face.

Daisy gave him a little, wistful

smile. Her affection for him was as strong as ever. The fever had not burnt it up, nor was it killed by the pains that racked her tender body. Presently, she murmured a request that he would come beside her. The nurse made room for him by the pillow. He knelt down, clenching one hand in the white counterpane with a vice-like grasp, and holding gently in the other the wasted fingers that Daisy stole feebly toward him.

"Woland, dear boy," she murmured, in a scarcely audible voice, "I've been werry ill."

His forehead contracted a little. "Yes, I know," and his voice was very soft and tender and had the sound of tears in it.

"But I'm better now. Mebbe I'll get up in de mornin'."

He looked at her. For one instant the rigid control in which he held himself almost gave way. But he recovered himself, and she went on feebly: "Will you carry me down to breakfus'?" Then her eyes closed. She seemed to be slipping away.

His face became like marble. The child was dying, and she did not know it. He put his lips to her ear: "Daisy," in an agonized voice, "this is a sad world; wouldn't you like to go and leave it?"

The child lifted her heavy lids. "Leave it," she lisped.

"Yes, and go to heaven," he ejaculated in a desperate, broken voice, "where the Lord Jesus our Saviour is. You will be very happy there. He will give you a white robe and a golden

harp, and you will have other little children to play with you; and there will be beautiful fields and flowers—"

"How werry nice," half sighed, half breathed the exhausted child. A sweet, almost seraphic smile, flitted over her little face. Then a doubt assailed her. With a last, supreme effort, she tried to raise herself, and look in his face. "Are you comin' too, Woland?"

A look of blank despair met her loving glance. Surprised and bewildered, she shook off for an instant her coming lethargy. "Woland," she said sharply, "I sha'n't go to heaven widout you." Then she sank back on the pillow—her eyes closed.

The frightful tension in which the lad held himself gave way. Her little fingers slipped

from his grasp, and he fell back in a dead faint. It did not disturb the little one however, and in a little time he was himself again, and anxiously watching the coming of the end.

CHAPTER IV

LIFE'S BENEDICTION

IF we poor, short-sighted mortals had the planning of our lives, how strangely would they be laid out! I had imagined that the child was going to die, in order that her influence over the life that had become so strangely mixed up with hers might live. It had not occurred to me that the lad, thrown into a state of desperation and feeling himself branded as her murderer, might be tempted to some rash act. Thank heaven, he was not put to it. The child did not die, but lived to be a further blessing to him.

When he waked from his swoon, we were able to whisper in his ear that she had fallen into a quiet sleep—that possibly there had been a mistake made. He staggered to his feet,

and sat by the sleeping child for a while, with a look of one who has received a reprieve from death, then went to his room and shut himself in. From that hour he was a different creature. The heavy stamp of affliction had been laid upon him. He was a man now, in the best sense of the word.

Day by day, Daisy steadily improved; Robertson was constantly with her, and until she was able to run about on her own small feet, he carried her everywhere in his strong arms. Sometimes he would walk up and down the halls for hours at a time, listening to her childish confidences and telling her stories with the utmost patience and gentleness. And his devotion did not cease when her strength returned. Her solitary life was at an end. Half his leisure

time he spent with her. This had the inevitable effect of lessening his intercourse with his former boon companions. They had claimed a monopoly of his time. Now he got in with another set—these jolly, good fellows, who kept him out in the daytime, playing out-door games, and sending him home so exhausted that he wanted no further excitement for the night, but a book, a comfortable seat, and Daisy's good-night kiss.

The child was proving a guardian angel to him, and not only to him, but to all the house. An astonishing change had come over her since her illness. She was always gentle now, never sullen, and cheerful sometimes to gayety. The boarders had all taken to petting her—she was a link to bind them together and make them less selfish—and she seemed to appreciate their atten-

tions, though her preference for Robertson was decidedly marked. Even Mrs. Drummond was changing. She often took Daisy on her lap now, and I had seen her brush away a tear when the child tried to smooth out her wrinkles with her tiny hand.

It was late in the summer when Daisy recovered from the fever. All through the autumn, Robertson gave her walks and drives, bought her picture-books and toys to amuse herself with during his absence, and with a sense of gratitude far beyond her years, her little heart seemed running over with love toward him.

Before the autumn closed my business connections took me away, and for several years I was a stranger to Fairfax. One winter day, when the air was thick with snowflakes, I came

back. My first thoughts were of the Drummonds and Roland Robertson. Strange to say, he was one of the first men I met. He knew me at once, gave me a hearty greeting, and insisted upon my going along with him to his house.

There was no need to ask him how he was getting on. His surroundings showed worldly prosperity, his face, the happy, upright man. He looked grave when I spoke of the Drummonds. "Poor Mrs. Drummond—she has been dead for two years. She was utterly worn out."

"And Daisy?"

He stroked a heavy moustache. His object, I think, was to conceal a smile. "She is in England at school. Her holidays she spends with my people."

"And do they like her?"

"Immensely. She has grown to be a very beautiful girl, both in disposition and looks." Then opening his coat, he drew from an inner pocket a picture—the head of a lovely young girl.

I scarcely recognized the delicate child of old. "And does she keep up her devotion to you?"

"She does." He gave me a decidedly amused glance; carefully replaced next the photograph two or three pressed white field daisies that had fallen out, and put it back in his pocket.

"And what is to become of her?" I went on curiously.

He looked about his handsome, but solitary

drawing room. "I am going to England in the spring, to get her," he said with a laugh. "I have tried living without her, and I can endure it no longer."

The End.